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LETTER DATED 21 NOVEMBER 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF RWANDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward to you herewith the text of a statement on the question of the number of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire as at 21 November 1996.

Following consultations with the representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) based in Rwanda, the question of the Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire has now been clarified.

Please find attached a copy of the statement which was issued after consultations with the above-mentioned United Nations bodies.

I should be grateful if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Gideon KAYINAMURA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
of Rwanda to the United Nations

Annex

Statement issued by the Government of Rwanda on 21 November 1996 following consultations with the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund

A meeting was called by the Minister of Rehabilitation and Social Integration on 21 November 1996 to examine the situation of Rwandan refugees returning from Zaire, as well as to establish how many Rwandan refugees needed assistance in south Kivu (Bukavu area).

In view of the conflicting figures for Rwandan refugees still in Zaire, the meeting examined recorded UNHCR figures in eastern Zaire before the current massive repatriation of refugees and agreed that the bulk of the Rwandan refugees in Zaire had returned to Rwanda.

The meeting, basing itself on UNHCR figures of 26 September 1996, agreed that the total number of Rwandan refugees in south Kivu was about 380,000 with a 10 per cent margin of error.

In view of the fact that neither UNHCR nor the Government of Rwanda had done a physical count of the refugees who had recently returned, considering the fact that all camps in north Kivu were empty, noting that interviews with the refugees had established that refugees arriving in Rwanda through Gisenyi included refugees from Bukavu who had moved northward as a result of the war in the south, and also noting the figure of 380,000 Rwandan refugees in south Kivu before the 1996 war, the meeting concluded that statements claiming that there were 500,000 or 700,00 Rwandan refugees still in the Bukavu area were totally incorrect and misleading.

The meeting also observed that those who had moved to the west of Bukavu during the fighting could be either Burundis, Zaireans or Rwandans. There are indications that this group is moving eastwards. The meeting appealed to the aid agencies to provide the necessary assistance to the entire affected population in eastern Zaire.

The meeting also confirmed that there are daily crossings of refugees from the Bukavu area through the Cyangugu border post and other crossing points in the south.

The meeting noted that a team composed of WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR and UNDP has been allowed into Bukavu to make an assessment of humanitarian needs.

The meeting was informed that humanitarian agencies, particularly UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, ICRC and others, are on standby in Cyangugu and are ready to operate in the south Kivu area as soon as possible.

The Government of Rwanda undertook to continue to use its good offices to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need in eastern Zaire, especially the repatriation of all Rwandan refugees.

The meeting was attended by the Ministers of Health and Foreign Affairs, the political adviser to the Vice-President and Minister of Defence, the Personal Assistant to the Vice-President and Minister of Defence, the Special Envoy of UNHCR in the Great Lakes region and the representatives of UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and the International Committee of the Red Cross.